

Loose Lead Walking

By "Loose Lead Walking" I mean walking on a Loose Lead without pulling.

First, I have to lay a little theory! Dogs do what works. Simple. For many dogs, they have always dragged their owners places. Why do they do this? First of all, because it WORKS. Don't they always get where they wanted to go by dragging? Silly dogs probably think - leash means I pull my owner to the park! Also, dogs have a very strong urge to resist pressure. When they feel the pressure on their necks, they about can't help but pull against it. That's why sled dogs have so much fun! So, how to get the dog to stop pulling? You simply stop making it work for him.

Old Fact: pulling gets me to the park, *New Fact:* pulling **doesn't** get me to the park!

Now, although what I am going to describe is simple, it doesn't work quickly for most dogs. The longer the dog has been successfully pulling, of course, the harder it will be to convince him that it is no longer going to work. So, you want to set yourselves up to be as successful as possible. The first thing you want to do is get him tired out, so take him for a good long romp or ball throwing session. Then begin your training. Be sure your dog is not wearing any kind of choke or prong collar - just a plain "buckle" collar. Then you are ready for your training.

Loose Lead Practice Exercise

The walk does not start when you go outside your front door, its starts the moment you put the lead on the dog. If you have an excitable dog and he see's you with the lead and rushes hysterically to the front door, then you go and join him to put his lead on, you have already encouraged him to rush ahead of you, to receive his reward more quickly, the walk. So, start in another room, by calling your dog to you and attaching the lead...now for the exercise.....Remember all of that attention work you've been doing? Warm him up a bit with that first.



In the hand you hold the lead in, imagine you also have a cup of coffee and it is filled to the brim, so the slightest pressure on the lead will have you spilling some! Now using the moving exercise from class walk to the front door, but one drop, just one drop spilt and you must stop and return to the exact spot you started from.

Whenever you have to stop because the dog is pulling don't say or do anything except STOP (remember... you are teaching him that pulling no longer works). Stand perfectly still and do.... nothing. Don't check back or say a word, just stand your ground & let him flail around at the end of the leash. After awhile, he will get confused & turn around & look at you (wondering what the heck is going on!). The instant he turns toward you, smile and take a few steps backwards and bring your dog back with you. Get him under control again, if necessary have him sit in front of you for a few seconds, then proceed forward, making sure you are rewarding him (Click and Treat) for doing so properly, if he exerts pressure on lead again, repeat the above procedure. It's best to be patient and wait for him to turn on his own, but if he's taking forever, say his name (if you've been doing your attention work he'll turn around for that). Try to imagine that your dog pulling on the leash steps on your brake! Repeat about a zillion times.

When the dog walks, even for 1-2 steps on a loose lead remember to praise this and (Click & treat) offer a tasty treat. Look for every chance to reinforce a loose leash without needing to get the dog's attention on you. Be vigilant and reinforce with click & treat every time he is **NOT** pulling. Remember to reward while walking after you Click. On reaching the door, have the dog "sit" to bring him under control, Jackpot.

Opening the door

Now when you get to the door and the dog is sitting, open the door, but if the dog gets out of the sit, don't say anything, just shut the door again, let the dog learn his actions cause this consequence (its the fastest way to learn, say nothing until the dog understands what's required). If the dog sits after shutting the door Click & Treat.

Stepping out the door

Once you can open the door wide and your dog remains sitting, step out the door before your dog and then allow him through, then put him in the "sit" again while you close the door. If your dog follows you out or bounds out in front of you without your permission stop don't say anything and bring him back inside, shut the door and wait for your dog to sit. Begin again when dog sits to open the door and step outside.

The Walk Out

Once you can step outside and your dog sits we can start the walk out. Start walking to the driveway, car, sidewalk, etc., just holding the end of the leash. Within a second or two he will probably hit the end of the leash and dig in to start pulling. YOU STOP (remember... you are teaching him that pulling no longer works). Stand perfectly still and do... nothing. Don't check back or say a word, just stand your ground & let him flail around at the end of the leash. After awhile, he will get confused & turn around & look at you (wondering what the heck is going on!). The instant he turns toward you, smile and take a few steps backwards and smartly bring your dog back with you. Get him under control again, if necessary have him sit beside you for a few seconds, then proceed forward, making sure you are rewarding him (Click and Treat) for doing so properly, if he exerts pressure on lead again, repeat the above procedure. It's best to be patient and wait for him to turn on his own, but if he's taking forever, say his name (if you've been doing your attention work he'll turn around for that). Try to imagine that your dog pulling on the leash steps on your brake! Repeat about a zillion times.

Some dogs get the concept pretty quickly, others have the pulling habit ingrained so well they have a more difficult time. They are not stubborn, just well trained pullers!! Eventually, though, your dog will figure out that pulling no longer gets him where he wants to go. Now, to get there he must *not* pull.

You'll know he's getting it when he hits the end of the leash... and pulls back or turns around right away. At first, be sure to work without distractions to make it easier for him, but as he is doing better & better you can start to add those in.

To be successful you are going to have to be as consistent as possible. That means never letting him pull you anywhere EVER (unless you actually have a harness on him for carting or tracking, of course). I think it's important to try to get several good long Loose Lead Walks in at the beginning of the training. By long I mean *time*, not distance. People with hard core pullers may not get more than to the door the first few times! Combine steps slowly, reviewing with the dog as you go. I believe the dog needs the many repetitions of him pulling-you and stopping so he gets the point & can make the connection. At that point he can decide to alter his behavior to get what he wants, which is to move forward.

Need a way to walk your dog during the time it takes to teach Loose Leash Walking? Try a Gentle Leader Headcollar - an instant cure (but only works when it's on).

Happy Walking!

Some definitions we put together to describe different types of pullers:

Anticipation Puller

This dog usually pulls on the way out for a walk, but much less on the way home. The walk usually takes the same route and on reaching the destination, the dog will be able to free run, which is an enormous reward in itself. So in its haste to get to the destination, the dog pulls on the lead and is then rewarded for that pulling by being let off. On the way home the dog pulls a lot less as its non rewarding to go home again.

Dominant Dog

This dog usually pulls as much going out as it does coming home again. This is because it views itself as a higher-ranking animal within the pack, and the leader always leads the way. So we firstly have to correct that relationship and put the owners in a higher-ranking position, which does not involve the use of force, reprimand or confrontation.

Sniffing Dog

This dog enjoys nothing more than pulling you to the next sniff...to this dog the world is like a major big bulletin board, with messages left every where and messages to be left in return. It will cross in front of you quite often in its attempts to find the next scent mark and will also pull, intermittently throughout the walk.

Leaning Dog

This dog has learned to lean his/her shoulders into the collar and lead literally leaning forward, the only thing that stops the dog going head first into the floor is the fact the lead is holding it up! Staffies can be commonly seen doing this.

Fearful Puller

Dogs is afraid of environment, pulls only to get home.